

Parish of Berkswell – Assembly

Minutes of the Parish Assembly held on 24th May 2018

1. Attendance and apologies

Forty-three people attended the assembly. Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Dave Bell, Parish Councillors Edwards and Cambage, and residents Jim Ellis and Michael Palmer. The PC Clerk was not able to attend due to special domestic circumstances.

2. Chairman's report

The Chairman (Councillor Richard Drake) gave a report on the parish council's activities for the year to end April 2018. A summary is shown in the attachment. Councillor Drake invited the audience to join him in thanking Councillor Burrow for his considerable and continuing service to our Parish and there was a fulsome round of applause.

3. Issues discussed

a. The Well

A resident expressed concern that the well was not flowing away properly and was concerned that the level was high enough to represent a danger of drowning. Councillor Burrow responded that the Well was not owned by anyone although the PC did mow the grass and residents did some gardening work. Severn Trent had cleared the outflow pipe of roots and he had been to inspect it that morning with Bill Bailey and found that the outflow grill was partially blocked. It was explained that a resident had for years undertaken cleaning work in the well and ensured the outlet was clear but regrettably that resident was no longer with us. Councillor Burrow sought a volunteer to be "well warden" and after the meeting a volunteer came forward. (Note a working party of 4 residents cleared the outflow, debris from in and around the well on Saturday 26th May)

b. Parish Governance Review

There was a lively debate on the parish boundary review with various views expressed. The Chairman explained that the parish council did not have a view on what the outcome should be but felt strongly that residents should express their view to Solihull Council.

c. Buzzards

A resident expressed concern that several nesting sites for buzzards had been abandoned. He had found a dead polecat at the base of one nesting tree and found that its belly had been sliced open and the intestines removed. It was possible that this was poisoned bait and the police and RSPCA were involved.

d. HS2

It was reported that HS2 Ltd were considering/proposing to use Hallmeadow Road as a haul route to avoid the centre of Balsall Common and a change to the haul route in Barrett's Farm outside of the Act limits which would require legislation.

Berkswell Parish Assembly, 24th May 2018.

The Jordan Room, Berkswell Village

Parish Chairman's Report

Financial

In the last financial year your council spent £87k. After income of £39k, this resulted in a deficit of £48k, which has reduced our reserves to £62k. This was a deliberate decision of your council. For a number of years we have had reserves higher than necessary. We decided to reduce the precept (the amount of money we take from you) by c50% to £26k. Our reserves are still higher than we think necessary and we have decided to leave the precept at this low level for another year. It is your money, we shouldn't keep it "just in case". We will still have adequate reserves in keeping with recommended guidelines.

Full details of our expenditure can be found on our website together with the audit report. We are lucky to have a qualified accountant as our clerk and our finances are managed to a very high standard.

Council Activities during the last year:

Neighbourhood Development Plan

A committee of 3 councillors as well 4 residents (2 from Berkswell Parish and 2 from Balsall Parish) have been extremely busy working on this for the last year.

We have been well supported by local volunteers and an excellent consultant. This is progressing well, we have had a great response to the recent consultation and we hope to have this completed in the next 12 months. We had 923 responses to the consultation, 95% support our Vision and Objectives, 311 people wrote over 600 additional comments for us to analyse and consider. An NDP will help mitigate the impact of any new development(s) and entitle us to a larger share of the developers' contribution to local infrastructure costs. (**NB** an NDP cannot prevent development(s), that is down to SMBC, neither can it make decisions on roads, schools or transport).

Local Plan: We are committed to resisting any development in Greenbelt land.

Solihull's timetable continues to slip. Lobbying from local residents in addition to councillors has been successful in getting local PDL (brownfield) sites registered. Your council has also engaged professional consultants to advise us in challenging erosion of the greenbelt and especially the Meriden Gap in our parish.

Berkswell Village Traffic Calming

Local consultations have taken place on a number of options suggested by the consultants. 152 forms were filled in. The results are being analysed and will be published in due course.

Local election

Thanks to intervention by councillors this year's local elections were held at the Church which meant Berkswell School did not need to close for the day. This is a permanent change saving at least a day of schooling each year. Popular with parents if not the children.

The Well

This long running saga is finally drawing to a close! Councillors have been involved in a long running and tortuous communication with Severn Trent which has finally found the problem which is now being sorted.

Planting

Your council has supported the work of the Berkswell Society and many volunteers in helping to keep our parish so colourful.

Berkswell Station

We have adopted the station. With the Berkswell Society we stock and maintain 5 planters with the help of volunteers.

Christmas Trees

This year we financed the placing of Christmas Trees at several locations around the parish. They were tended by local volunteers and were well received by our residents and visitors.

The bench on the Green

Special mention must go to one of our residents (Alistair Dymond) who spent many hours refurbishing the bench around the tree. This has now been replaced (7 strong locals helped with lifting and positioning) and on my travels through the village seems to be well used by our visitors on sunny days.

Grants

We have continued to support local organisation with a range of grants, including, the Heart of England School, The Hornets, Berkswell Scouts, St Peter' Hall (for Balsall Common U3A), The Jubilee amongst others. We seek to support activities for young people and the work of volunteer organisations.

Volunteers

I cannot finish this report without making special mention of the people in our community who work voluntarily on a wide range of activities. Over 40 people have helped on the NDP alone, from delivering leaflets/surveys or helping with events to spending hours reading and analysing responses. Some of those activities are mentioned above but there are many others. Your council would certainly cost you a lot more without their support and the community would be poorer in many other ways as well.

Richard Drake, Chairman